

us. So the voice of God follows us after through all of life, to woo us, to interest us, and to win us for Himself. Lost, therefore, is each day in which the voice of God passes by us in the wind of the day, but leaves us unmoved and indifferent. While blessed in turn is each day in which in "the wind of the day" God comes so near to the soul that the approach turns into communion, in the intimacy and tenderness of which with fresh draughts we enjoy again the unfailing love of God.

17

"THOU SETTEST A PRINT UPON THE
ROOTS OF MY FEET."

We are always repelled in Psalm 39 by the hard words which David there addresses to God: Look away from me, that I may brighten up. For can we imagine a more unnatural prayer than this?

Man and God constitute the greatest antithesis. And all true religion, springing from our creation after the image of God, aims solely and alone to put man into closest communion with God, or where this communion is broken, to restore it. And here the Psalmist, who still counts as the Singer who has interpreted piety most profoundly, prays and cries, not for the approach of God, but that God will look away from his soul, that He will leave him alone, give him rest, and so refresh the last hours of his life before dying: "Hear my prayer, O Lord, hold not thy peace at my tears, look away from me, that I may brighten up, before I go hence, and be no more." (R. V. Marg. read.)

In Psalm 42 he said: "As the heart panteth

after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God." And here it is the direct opposite: "Turn thee away from me, that my soul may refresh itself." On the one hand intense longing for the joy of the presence of God, and on the other hand the cry of agony for deliverance from God's presence. Does it not seem, at first, that the one is a malediction against the other?

This bitter wail of David does not stand alone. In the book of Job we find an even still more painful expression for this crushing consciousness of the presence of the Lord, when, as if to pour out his consuming anguish in fullest measure, he despairingly exclaims: "Thou putttest my feet in the stocks and thou settest a print upon the roots of my feet" (13:27 Marg. read).

By itself there is nothing strange in this feeling. Even godless people are familiar with this agonizing dread. When mortal danger suddenly overtakes them, they handle, as it were, with their hands the power of God which presses upon them. In case of shipwreck in the open sea it is seen again and again that godless sailors who but a few moments before over their wine-cups were making light of everything that is holy, suddenly terror-stricken, spring from their seats with the cry: "O God, O God," and pale with fear, struggle for their lives.

And aside from these, with ordinary people who do not mock at religion but live without God in the world, when serious sickness comes upon them, or some other disaster overtakes them, we see the same effect. They also suddenly become aware at such a time that they have to do with the terrible unknown power of that God whom they

have long ignored, and they tremble in their hearts.

In ordinary life we are sufficient unto ourselves. We extricate ourselves from our little difficulties. We have the means at command to provide against special needs. We know how to rise above simple adversities. And when they are overcome, the triumph deepens the sense of our self-sufficiency.

In the midst of all this we feel free, unconstrained and unencumbered. In the face of it all we are our own lord and master. We feel ourselves measureably opposed, but we push it aside and bravely we continue the tenor of our way.

All this, however, changes when anxieties, dangers and disasters overtake us, which overwhelm us, which we have no strength to face, which nothing can prevent, and in the midst of which we become suddenly aware of our utter helplessness. Then we feel that we are attacked by a superior force that overpowers us, that casts us down, that forces itself upon us and makes all resistance ludicrous and futile. This superior force then presents itself to us as an unseen and unknown opponent, who mysteriously cuts the tendon of our strength, binds us as with bands of death, distresses and perplexes us with mortal agonies, and leaves us nothing but a cry of terror. And however much the world has been estranged from God, even in the hearts of the most hardened sinners, there is, in such moments, still some trembling in the presence of the Divine majesty. There are many who have no faith in God, but anxious forebodings fill their minds, that they are yet to have dealings with him. And their self-reproach, that

they have so long ignored him, adds to the terror of their fears.

But this apprehension of dread affects the godly man most strongly when faith fails him, and God momentarily lets him go. Then it seems that God loosens his hold on the soul and at the same time tightens his hold more firmly on the body. A man like Job could not think of anything that did not come to him from God. He had long enjoyed the peace of God which passeth all understanding. And when the evil day came and loss followed loss, he could only consider them as so many arrows from the bow of divine displeasure to grieve and mortally to wound him. And because Job was inwardly pious, it could not end with this. At first he thought that God in anger stood far off, and with arrow upon arrow wounded him from the distance. But he perceives that God comes to him, and at length personally attacks him. And when he feels that God has come upon him, as man against man, that He attacks him and is ready to throw him, his fear becomes more striking. A tyrant attacking Job and overcoming him in order to render him helpless, might at most put his feet in stocks. Now that God attacks him, this can not be the end. He perceives that God not only faces him and attacks him from without, but that by his Almighty power God enters into his inmost soul, goes through him altogether, until at length he feels himself penetrated to his feet, even to the roots of his feet by the Almighty One, and crushed beneath the weight of His anger.

Only they who are truly pious can suffer this mortal agony. Divine anger can only be felt in

this way by those who all their life have been deeply impressed by God's power. For there is a two-fold sense of God's presence. Now in blessed fellowship with God. And again in the awful consciousness of God's terrible presence in the fears that assail us. And if we were dealt with after our sins and according to our deserts, this latter fellowship would be our only portion, even fellowship with God in his holy anger. This it will forever be in hell. This is hell.

Here on earth diversion and all sorts of means are at our command to put the thought of God away from us. The ungodly enjoy this awful privilege in life that they can sin, without being troubled in their conscience for more than a few moments at a time by the presence of Almighty God. They can put a screen between themselves and God and thus be far distant from him. But not so in eternity. There they stand continually in the presence of God. This awful consciousness of God's presence will be the worm that dieth not and the fire that is not quenched.

It is different with those who here on earth have known what it is to be at peace with God. They have experienced divine grace. God withdraws himself in their behalf in such a way that He hides his anger from them and veils his terrible majesty. Notwithstanding their sins, He with himself, and without mortal fear, to have fellowship with him. The screen of the vanities of this world does not stand between God and those who fear him, but Christ the Reconciler, the Goel, the Mediator. And thus already here on earth sweet and blessed communion with God in Christ can be enjoyed.

But if momentarily faith fails us, and the shield of Christ is taken away from before us, and in the midst of afflictions we feel ourselves suddenly face to face again with the naked majesty of God in his anger, the agony of soul in God's otherwise devoted children is more terrible than the children of the world have ever experienced on earth. The child of God is then caught, as it were, in the snares of hell. Such was the case with Job. This made him say: "O, My God, thou settest a print in the roots of my feet." This made David pray: "O my God, look away from me, that I may recover strength before I die." And this is grace: that in such moments the Comforter comes to the soul, that the shield of Christ is placed again before us, and that God who made his anger burn against us, reveals himself again to his tempest-tossed child as Abba Father.

18

"MY SHIELD."

In the Dutch national hymn the words are still sung by patriotic assemblages and in the streets, "My Shield and Confidence, Art Thou, O Lord, My God." And they but echo the Psalmist's song (84:11): "The Lord is a sun and shield: The Lord will give grace and glory: No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly."

As a means of defense the shield has passed out makes it possible for them to become acquainted of use. In our times battles are fought at great distances, with cannons and rapid firing guns. And safety is sought in lying on the ground or in hiding behind breastworks. But even when David